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Special Issue: “Hybrid Warfare in Asia” 18 January 2018

Introduction “Hybrid Warfare in Asia: Its Meaning and Shape”

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Abstract:

This special issue explores how and to what extent ‘hybridity’ informs national policy, doctrines, and military transformation in Asia. The introduction engages with three preliminary issues as a way to set the broader analytical context. It reviews the concept of ‘hybrid warfare’ to make the case that versions of this notion have long been a feature of regional strategic thinking and practice. It similarly argues that maritime geography has had an impact on how ‘hybrid’ courses of actions in the region have been conceptualised, notably in regards to ‘grey zone’ operations. Lastly, it reviews the question of how to engage with the issue of the effectiveness of such strategies.

Key Words: hybrid warfare; hybrid strategy; maritime security; military effectiveness;

Why ‘Hybrid’ warfare in Asia?

The term hybrid warfare has recently attracted a great deal of scholarly attention predominantly in relation to Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. In strategic and security studies, such events have contributed to produce a shift in focus on the on-going debate about the transformation of warfare. Away from investigating irregular tactics employed by non-state actors, scholarship has re-engaged with the study of the consequences of the use of asymmetric and non-linear strategies by both great powers and weak states. (Hoffman, 2007; Hammes, 2006; Galeotti, 2016; Giles, 2016; Lanoszka, 2016). Within this literature, the use of the word ‘hybrid’ in relation to

state actors has implied strategies that mobilise a variety of state levers of power, producing a blend of conventional and non-conventional tactics aimed at keeping the use of force under the threshold of open war. In the context of major power competition, the use of such hybrid strategies has been predicated upon the assumption of an intention to limit military escalation (in some cases under the cover of a nuclear umbrella).

This literature has not, however, given much attention to Asia. This is surprising since this part of the world offers a potentially fertile ground for the study of the 'hybridization' of contemporary warfare. Asia is home to the world's second and third largest economies and, as data from the International Institute of Strategic Studies suggest, the region's defence spending continues to rise, having surpassed Europe in 2012 (IISS 2012).¹ Such economic and military power is being mobilized by established and emerging powers with diverse political systems to compete over the future of the region's security architecture. From an economic perspective, growing interdependence is contrasted with alternative visions of the normative frameworks for maintaining stability at sea and on land and to promote prosperity and growth. From the Chinese-sponsored Belt and Road Initiative to the Japanese vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region, military, diplomatic and economic tools are being mobilised to pursue seemingly competing ideas of regional order and security. Further, regional state actors with complex and diverse geography, history, and cultural heritage, notably in Southeast Asia, have had to face challenges from non-state actors domestically and trans-nationally – challenges that seem to have increased with the advent of global jihadism.

Within this context, a first counterintuitive observation is that in Asia, state and non-state actors alike do in fact deploy hybrid strategies to achieve their political agendas. Yet, this topic remains largely outside the scope of the literature on hybrid warfare – as much as of that on Asian security. Why is this the case? How can this gap be reduced? This observation represents a driving motivation behind this special issue, leading to the formulation of a series of questions. How can (and should) we understand hybrid warfare in the Asian region? Is hybrid warfare taking shape in ways potentially distinct from other parts of the world? What are its implications for security in the region and beyond? How can external actors with long-term stakes in the region prepare for the increasing prevalence of hybrid approaches to strategy? And,

¹ 'Asia Defence Spending to Overtake Europe', *Financial Times*, 07 March 2012.

has the ongoing hybridization of national strategies in Asia the potential to lead to a fundamentally different security order in the region? These questions underscored the preparation of this issue, although the main goal of the contributors was not to offer definitive answers to all of them. Rather, it was to start a wider conversation, one linking a main debate in the field military and strategic studies to the agenda of Asian security studies.

Insofar as the preliminary question of why understanding 'hybridity' in the Asian context matters, the ensemble of the papers in this issue seem to suggest three reasons. The first has to do with the role that hybrid courses of action have had in Asian history. The second has to do with Asian geography and its impact on preferences for hybrid strategies. The third reason relates to the question that hybrid strategies seem to be the preference of a weaker party. On the first reason, historically, strategy in Asia has long featured aspects of hybridity. Whether in the case of the security interactions in the Korean Peninsula (see Bowers), or in the context of Chinese security practice (see Patalano), and non-state actors in Southeast Asia (see Ong), regional strategies have long featured characteristics that would enable them to be regarded, to some extent, as hybrid. Indeed, from this perspective, an analysis of the current strategic situation in Asia does not give the impression of 'novelty' in the way of the European and trans-Atlantic 'discovery' of Russian 'new' way of war.

This, in turn, raises the issue of the explanatory value of employing the term 'hybrid'. A review of recent hybrid activities in the region would suggest that indeed there is value in using the term to examine trends in the region. In particular, the combined analysis in this issue suggests that more and more actors are choosing to combine various methods of fighting that are available to them, drawing not merely upon hard capabilities; rather, they seek to combine different levers of national power, from the legal, to the political, and the economic, as much as upon military assets in a fashion that is consistent with the way in which hybridity has been used to examine Russian activities. For example, in the Asian context, as Alessio Patalano's essay shows, China has both the ambition and capabilities to develop a sophisticated hybrid strategy, encompassing a highly integrated use of military and non-military capabilities combined with a creative reconfiguration of the legal and communication aspects of security.

In this issue, the attempt to examine hybrid courses of actions to emphasise the links between different levers of power implies that the notion of 'hybridity' is a type of *strategy* for both state and non-state actors in the region. By looking at hybridity as a strategy, the essays in this issue seek to explore the challenges of hybrid warfare not from the perspective of their effects – as it is the case in most of the literature on Russian hybridity. Instead, the different essays seek to examine preferences for hybridity linking ends to available means and resources, within specific limitations, internal or external to the actors in concern. From this perspective, what emerges from the overall issue is an important point about how, while technology is creating a permissive environment for hybrid warfare to develop, hybridity may indicate a strategy making the best of inherent limitations in available options, rather than an optimal strategy. This seems to be the case especially looking at the contributions by Stephen Biddle, Ian Bowers, and Ong Wei Chong.

A second reason that makes the question of hybrid strategies in Asia of significant interest within the context of the wider debate over the hybridization of contemporary warfare is its link to geography. As French geopolitical expert Francois Joyaux noted in the early 1990s, Asian geography and security are inherently intertwined, especially the central role that the maritime domain has in connecting (or dividing) the majority of regional actors (Joyaux, 1993). In this respect, Asian geography stands at the opposite spectrum of that of Europe – where the regional sea basins are peripheral to the main continental focus. Authors in this issue identify the *critical importance of geography – especially maritime geography – as a condition that gives rise to particular forms of hybrid warfare as strategy*. Hence, Ong argues that the new Sino-US competition over access and the use of the maritime commons has contributed to inform the development of China's hybrid strategy and the US responses to it. Such observations echo Hew Strachan's argument that Russian success in Ukraine owes more to context-specific strategy than the utility of hybrid warfare as a category per se [as cited in Renz, p. 288].

In Asia, the impact of maritime geography on hybrid strategy is particularly significant in China's case. As Patalano argues, Beijing's development of a wide spectrum of maritime capabilities – military, constabulary, and paramilitary – matches China's pursuit of a coercive strategy with claims to sovereign rights in the East and South China Seas as well as to assert a broader strategic role. Within this context, Chinese strategy is hybrid in that it seeks to mobilise asymmetric capabilities – especially from the coast guard and the maritime militias – under the guise of seemingly sound legal

regimes and political rhetoric to prevent or limit responses. Chinese strategy in these maritime theatres would appear to be consistent with a longstanding facet of Chinese approach to warfare, i.e. the one concerning the three warfares (Patalano and Ong in this volume).

This link between maritime geography and hybrid strategy is perhaps one of the reasons why in the Asian context, scholars have favored the term 'grey zone conflict/strategy' (including the government of Japan as analyzed in this volume by Takahashi). This expression is by and large employed to focus on the operational space between war and peace where coercion is used to keep conflict 'below the traditional thresholds of high-end war'. However, as this issue demonstrates, the utility and appropriateness of the term remains highly debatable. Ong identifies that the notion is helpful in accounting for the changing character of the conflict space – i.e., the blurring of boundaries of the war-conflict-peace spectrum. On the other hand, Patalano is more critical of the empirical utility of the expression given the danger of escalation and the impossibility of establishing when specific tensions occur where the threshold bar is set. Regardless of these different positions, contributors to this volume seem to agree that grey zone conflicts in Asia are not historically unprecedented, challenging mainstream work in this field. From the contributors' perspective the grey zone conflict is at heart a hybrid strategy, which in the Asian context plays out predominantly in the maritime domain.

As a third consideration, exploring the question of hybridity in the Asian context points to use of this type of strategy as essentially an option of the weaker party. The notion of 'weakness' may be related to matters of perception or actual capabilities differentials; however, it is first and foremost about 'relative' differences – since Chinese strategy in regards to the United States, for example, may very well be different than Chinese strategy vis-à-vis ASEAN states with competing maritime claims. In competition against the United States and its allies, a hybrid strategy is inevitably an attractive option to create an impasse in the form of deterrent stalemate, whilst avoiding an escalation to all-out, open war (see Bowers, Ong in this volume). However, the effectiveness and consequences of the strategy need to be critically examined. The analyses contained in this volume underline that, despite the assumed potential of hybrid strategies to secure stated aims, the reality may point to different possibilities, ranging from highly escalatory strategic interlock to the formation of a mutually-hurting stalemates. Bowers in this volume, for example, analyzes the

situations in which hybrid warfare ceases to exist; namely, when current impasse gives way to a break-up to an open warfare; and when the current hybrid warfare as waged in stalemate transforms into volatile irregular warfare. Patalano, on the other hand, rules out the interpretation that hybrid warfare itself is inherently limiting to the lower-end of the conflict space. As he argues there is a real danger for war to erupt out of the cumulative strategic impact of lower-end of the spectrum initiatives such as the Chinese militarization of artificial military outposts in the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

With these three reasons in mind, the rest of this introduction will first develop, based upon the review of the existing concept(s) of hybrid warfare, an analytical framework. Such a framework will be complemented by a definition of key terms before summarizing the structure of the volume and of the articles in it.

What's in a concept? : Setting the analytical framework for Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid warfare as a concept has been used to characterize a variety of wars. The term has been used to characterize any of the following: a) irregular fighting methods, combined with sophisticated weapons, command and control, and combined arms tactics; b) the modes of warfare, in which conventional and irregular methods are mixed in the same theatre of battle; and c) the subordination of military methods to strategic communications.

The upsurge in domestic and localized conflict since the end of the Cold War heightened interest among Western analysts to better comprehend the changing nature of war, giving rise to theories about the breakdown of Clausewitzian trinity (Creveld, 1991), or the effect of globalization and the rise of identity politics (Kaldor, 1998). Amidst these trends, the term hybrid warfare has gained much currency, as it seems to capture not only the increasing availability of high-tech weapons to non-state actors, whose mastery of these weapons surpassed the expectations of many Western observers, but also the merging of various modes of warfare in contemporary armed struggle. Hence, the term hybrid war gained recognition at the time of the 2006 war between the Hezbollah and Israel in southern Lebanon, where the former's remarkably conventional defence against Israel's potent conventional force surprised many observers. Frank Hoffman observed that 'Hezbollah's fusion of several distinct "modes of warfare" left the Israelis struggling with targeting and force protection' (Hoffman 2007). Taking stock of related concepts such as 4th Generation Warfare (Hammes, 2006),

Compound Wars (Huber, 1996), Unrestricted Wars (Liang and Xiangsui, 1999), as well as analyses put forward by US and Australian defence establishments (US Department of Defense, 2005), Hoffman noted that future wars will not be squarely categorized into simple classification of conventional or irregular modes of conflicts (such as traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive as compiled by the 2005 US National Defence Strategy). Rather, he recognized that the particular feature that characterizes contemporary and future conflict would be the *convergence* of alternative or different methods of war (Hoffman 2007, p.28), arguing that hybrid wars will “blend the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare (ibid).²

Articulations such as that of Hoffman did not remain without critique, conceptually or empirically. One such criticism was that hybrid warfare was historically ‘not new’. (Mansoor, p.3). Angstrom draws on within-case analysis of the conduct of war by two “hybrid” actors, the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami, during the past thirty years in Afghanistan, and finds that “hybrid represents an important continuity and strategic option in Afghan warfare”, with an important qualification that hybridization is a “contingent result of the dynamics of some conflicts but not others” (Angstrom, 2017, p. 838). For military historians, such as Murray and Mansoor, hybridity has always been part of warfare (Murray and Mansoor, 2012; US Department of the Army, 2010). Indeed, their volume on hybrid warfare analyzes various historical cases, including those from Asia, notably, Imperial Japanese Army’s operation in North China (Yamaguchi, 2012) and Vietnam (Lowe, 2012).

Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine prompted a new wave of debates about hybrid warfare. In Crimea, Russia’s aggressive policy of territorial annexation created a *fait accompli*, without provoking much reaction from the Western nations, just as its covert support to separatists in eastern Ukraine where Russian-speaking population was the majority dramatically increased incidents of open conflict. Russian actions in these incidents involved the coordinated and combined use of “conventional and unorthodox methods of warfare, including the use of covert Special Forces as

² Hoffman defines the notion rather broadly as: “Hybrid Wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of non-state actors. Hybrid Wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.” (p.4)

provocateurs, (dis)information campaigns by media outlets, cyber-attacks, and even leveraging its oil and gas resources to exert economic pressures.” (Bachmann and Gunneriusson, 2015, p.200). Many characterized this course of event as representing a ‘new way’ of warfare (ibid.)

Conceptually, the event aroused interest in how to characterize the seemingly “new” Russian actions, at the same time giving rise to a heated debate if this war had anything new at all (Galeotti, 2016; Rens, 2016; Giles, 2016; Charap, 2015). In the lack of a clear Russian doctrine on the matter (Charap, 2015; Galeotti, 2016), the concept and characterization of hybrid warfare has so far mirrored more the Western debates and understanding of unfolding events in Eastern Europe (Rens, 2016, pp.285-286).³ Given the prevailing ambiguity, analysts variedly used terms such as “ambiguous warfare” (UK House of Commons Defence Committee, July 2014), “full-spectrum warfare” (Johnson and Seely, 2015), or “non-linear” war (Pomerantsev, 2015).

Without a general agreement, ensuing debates soon led to a more critical scholarly position on the utility of the concept of hybrid warfare. For example, Lanoszka noted that Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine rendered the existing definition of hybrid war (as a combination of regular and irregular methods) unsatisfactory. The Russian combined regular and irregular methods of fighting; on the other hand, in Crimea these actions did not accompany the use of regular forces until Russian control of the peninsula was already secured (Lanoszka, 2016, p.178). Charap has argued that there is an inherent danger in labeling Russian methods as part of a hybrid strategy, since, to date, there is no clear Russian doctrine on ‘hybrid war’ (Charap, 2015, p.52). Again, the notion of hybrid war as (allegedly) applied by Russia in Eastern Europe is of limited acceptance amongst historians, who have no problem describing recent actions with other traditional terms, such as limited war and crisis management (Freedman, 2015; Freedman, 2014; Strachan, 2010). Experts further note that hybrid warfare is not a new Russian invention, having similar methods being employed before (Lanoszka, 2016; Renz, 2016; Galeotti, 2016).

Despite these conceptual challenges, the unfolding events in Europe profoundly impacted the concept of hybridity, in such a way that the notion has come to contain

³ The oft-cited article by the Russian Chief of General Staff, Valerii Gerasimov (2013) has been wrongly attributed as the sources of Russian approach to hybrid war. See Renz (2016), p. 286. See also Giles (2016), p 10.

some inherent tensions, or even dichotomies, which have some significant implications for the situation in Asia.

First of all, there is the irregular/non-state- and state/great power dichotomy. With the advent of Russian actions in Crimea and Ukraine, the notion has now come to capture, or imply, the heavy *state and great power involvement* in hybrid confrontations. As a result, it has created some interesting tensions within a literature that was previously concerned with initiatives of irregular actors with access to high-tech weaponry – just as the concept was initially developed by Hoffman and others (although state ‘hybrid’ actor was also part of hybridity). The emergence of a great power focus resonates with the Asian region’s heavily state-dominated security dynamics.

Second, there is a tension between the idea of hybrid warfare as a form or mode of warfare versus its understanding as part of a strategy. Hoffman’s definition focused on hybrid warfare as a method of merging of regular and irregular forms of warfare. Today, there is greater emphasis on its qualities *as a strategy*, although the former still retains relevance. As Lanoszka argues, the hybrid course of events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine indicates Russia’s deliberate choice of means to achieve specific sets of foreign policy goals in these places (Lanoszka, 2016). Hence the form necessarily follows the intent and the context. This understanding of hybridity as a strategy contrasts with the previous emphasis on the merging of different ‘modes’ of warfare, although these two dimensions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the case of Russian actions in Ukraine, as a form, they emphasized the coordinated use of irregular and regular methods to achieve ends that were different but complementary (ibid., 179).

Third, there is a dichotomy developing between decentralized command of hybrid war (such as in irregular or networked insurgency) and centralized hybrid war under a single, unified command. With or without reference to the term ‘hybrid warfare’, a number of analysts concluded that one of the genuine new developments in the case of Russian action in Crimea and eastern Ukraine was the unifying of various arms of national power, including the military and non-military, the economic, social and informational (Charap, 2015; Jonsson and Seely, 2015; Galeotti, 2016,). Hence, Jonsson and Seely argue that the more appropriate term than hybrid warfare to describe Russian actions in Ukraine is “Full Spectrum Conflict”, denoting “a centralized command and control that enables a high degree of coordination” (Jonsson and Seely,

2015, p. 6). The essence of such centralized command was that “[A]ll levels of the Crimean operation were coordinated to the same political aim” (ibid., p. 7), in implementation of the infamous Clausewitzian thesis whereby war is an act of force for a political end, which, to their view, permitted the theory and conduct of Russian forces. While this in theory resembles the model of single command in Western approach to “integrated approach” (whether it is implemented or not), and hence cannot be really called a ‘new’ way of thinking, this aspect, if it is to be seen a characteristics of hybrid warfare, complements the older focus on the merging of conventional and irregular modes of war.

Last but by no means least, there is a dichotomy between the focus on (the modes of) physical violence on the one hand, and information and other ‘non-kinetic’ elements on the other. The term hybrid war is now increasingly seen as implying the *subordination* of military operations to strategic communication - including most notably information and psychological operations (Jonsson and Seely, 2015, p.4; Galeotti, 2016; Giles, 2016). At the least, the term implies *coordination or synchronisation of* military operations with strategic communication. The importance of the communication domain – which in itself is historically not new as many would argue -- can be understood in the context of strategic coercion as inherent to hybrid confrontations. The link would rest on a dynamics of ‘plausible deniability’ (denial of one’s own involvement) to deter external intervention by confusing the potential opposition, denying responsibility, and forging a sense of popular support in the target area (Lanoszka, 2016, p. 180). Russian action in Crimea and eastern Ukraine also involved the use of strategic communication, such as de-linking different incidents – to control risks of escalation (Bachmann and Gunneriusson, 2015), where information dimension was key to affect physical violence. Analysts have always noted the importance of information domain, or narratives, in hybrid warfare (Hoffman, 2006), but the emphasis seems to shift to the relative importance of communication and information domains vis-a-vis military one, regular or irregular (Bolt, 2012).

Applying a framework: Hybrid warfare in Asia

The four dichotomies identified above underpin the investigation of the concept of hybrid warfare in the Asian context presented in this issue. First of all, the question of the applicability of the notion of ‘hybrid warfare’ in the region is intertwined with the rise of China, a major state actor. Since April 2012 - when Chinese vessels seized the

Scarborough shoal and launched a new phase of coercive actions in the region - several regional state actors have grown concerned of China's ability to successfully exploit the space between peace and war by means of hybrid strategies. This is particularly true in the context of territorial disputes, where competing claimant states from India to Vietnam, to Japan, fear that China may attempt to capture, through the use of mixed military and non-military capabilities, disputed territories or islands, and they worry about consequences of such actions.

Hence, the *hybridization of major power strategies* is a serious concern in the region, elevating the theoretical as well as policy debates concerning hybrid warfare beyond those involving irregular and non-state actors and asymmetry along those confines.⁴ A meaningful line of enquiry in this context, then, concerns the exploration of the possibility for regional major powers such as China to change the regional strategic balance by the means of a hybrid strategy. Related to this, another question pertains to the possibility of hybrid activities conducted by major powers to escalate to full-scale wars in this region.

In this context, it is interesting to note what Lanoszka identified as a contradiction of hybrid warfare (Lanoszka, 2016, p. 180). In hybrid warfare, hybrid actors seem to resort to both irregular warfare and the threat of military escalation for mutually contradicting purposes, where the former may imply aversion to military escalation, and the latter intended to destabilize its target and deter reactions. Such a dynamic, originally identified in Russian actions, may be applicable to the Asian context as well, implying some room for a serious miscalculation leading to conflict escalation. The Chinese use of 'salami tactics' is the case in point. Hence, the seeming attempt to confuse the targeted actor to avert military reaction (i.e., taking only a small slice of salami) stands at odds with the establishment of a *fait accompli* that may invite escalation - rather than preventing it.

A further meaningful consideration in this context concerns the question of whether hybrid war is a strategy of an anti-status quo power (Lanoszka, 2016). While some may agree with such characteristics in the context of Russian action in Eastern Europe, in theoretical terms there is nothing inherent in the concept itself that denotes specifically anti-status quo behavior. Indeed, this is where the information dimension of hybridity

⁴ On a related consideration of asymmetric strategies for major powers, see Breen M. and J. A. Geltzer(2011), 41-55.

becomes significant because the meaning of 'status-quo' itself is disputed and is the source of contention and contentious behavior. Hybrid warfare can be, and often is, a strategy of revisionist powers, but it does not have to be so. Depending upon what the political aim is (for example, reclaiming a lost territory or spheres of influence; trying to secure the existing regime or offset its relative weaknesses, as in the case of North Korea), hybrid warfare can be a strategy of both anti-status quo and status-quo powers. Often, indeed, political aims are hard to specify and prone to change over time, while intentions are hard to detect. For example, in the Asian region, while North Korea can be viewed as holding either a revisionist or status-quo aims, its use of hybrid warfare has been a constant feature since the Korean War. Further, this observation may imply, ironically, that even status-quo powers' hybrid strategy may provoke chain reactions that may result in an escalation.

The growing focus on state actors in the literature, however, does not change the reality of threats and risks posed by hybrid tactics used by non-state actors in the Asian region, as Ong points out in his paper. Of particular relevance today is the infiltration of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Southeast Asia. States in the region are hence faced with the need to prepare for both state and non-state actors employing hybrid strategies, and to prevent and prepare for serious potential destabilization and challenges to state authority (see also below.).

Secondly, the dichotomy between hybrid warfare as referring to modes of warfare or strategy offers a viable starting point for the analyses of confrontation in the Asian region. The concept of hybridity necessarily relies on both aspects. Modes of warfare and strategy need not be mutually exclusive. However, the concept of hybrid warfare as a strategy, a choice of (hybrid) means to an end, has historically been relevant in the Asian context. As the ensuing analyses will show, hybridity has always been a means to serve a political purpose in the region, in an essentially Clausewitzian dictum, as the actors struggled to deal with variety of opponents, either state, great or small, or non-state, that all use a variety of methods. In this context, states, such as North Korea, have not always been associated with conventional warfare and vice versa, non-state actors in the region have historically been backed up by, or used conventional capabilities.

In that sense, as articles in this volume show, it may be questionable to understand state and non-state actors, and further, conventional and irregular modes of warfare as

distinct categories; both may be better perceived as a continuum. Regardless of state or non-state status, different actors may choose most effective means to achieve their aims, which can be highly strategic/comprehensive or tactical, limited or opportunistic, with an important caveat that the choice is within their political, institutional and environmental confines. Analysis by Biddle in this volume shows that it would be no longer possible to equate state actors with conventional capabilities and non-state ones with irregular capabilities, but rather, both form a continuum. He goes on to argue that "[t]he very distinctions between 'conventional', 'irregular', and 'hybrid' warfare are actually differences of degree rather than kind" .

A third issue concerns the question of the centralization of command systems and to what extent such centralization is an asset in the context of a hybrid strategy. As the incident in 2010 where a Chinese fishing boat clashed with two Japanese Coast Guard ships in the East China Sea indicated, it is not always very transparent from the outside if a nation's various military, constabulary and irregular agencies are commanded by a central entity, particularly if command can be delegated to lower or regional levels.⁵ Articles in this volume, however, seem to suggest that the benefit to hybrid actors of integrated command, including military, paramilitary and constabulary elements, and most importantly, information dimension, is well-understood by the region's political leadership, resulting in policy and institutional adjustments.

In the Asian context, it is worth pointing out that the main state actors pursuing seemingly hybrid strategies, China and North Korea, possess centralized political systems. Authoritarian systems in theory are more favorably disposed towards centralized command structures than their democratic counterparts, especially in the information domain. In this context, Ong and Bowers explore how both China and North Korea use hybrid methods to gain strategic advantages, rather than often causing physical (or "kinetic") effects. The centralized regime of North Korea, hence, has tried to offset its isolated, weaker strategic position by using a variety of capabilities that "range across the spectrum of state instruments of power" in any combination of them, under a particular aim, be it political, economic or strategic.

⁵ Recent research reveals a clearer picture of Chinese command system over its maritime militia, where the command authority is divided between PLA and local governments, for example, See Kennedy and Erickson (2017).

China also finds hybridity helpful to offset the perceived “challenge” to China’s peaceful development, and uses in a highly integrated manner “a multi-dimensional set of military and non-military, including information, capabilities (Ong in this volume). North Korea, as Bowers underlines, utilises cyber warfare as a “controllable and deniable means” for political, economic and strategic purposes. It has targeted ROK government, media, banks, and infrastructure including Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power. And in so doing, it employs 6800 people to operate under the auspices of the Reconnaissance General Bureau, following a restructuring and centralization of disparate cyber units.

Lastly, the relative importance of controlling the degree of physical violence/kinetic elements, is another contentious issue in the hybrid literature which is highly relevant to evolving events in Asia. Specifically, state and non-state actors in the region seem to maintain a keen eye on the management of strategic communication to either reduce reliance on kinetic actions (or maximize the impact of limited military or constabulary coercion), or to deceive intentions behind coercive actions. Thus far, there has been no case equivalent to the Russian annexation of Crimea, where the information domain was handled by Russia for the strategic effect of preventing military escalation or Western intervention, through the use of communications to mask its own involvement, exploiting Western lack of resolve. The review provided in this volume suggests, however, that a broad range of information operation capabilities are available and being actively used by states in Asia. Their effect seems to draw benefit from the centralized nature of state actors with control over media, internet access, and so on. Strategic communication is used in combination with various forms of coercion to achieve maximum effect.

Evidence in this volume supports the view that state actors in Asia use strategic communication to confuse observers and to prevent military reaction or external intervention, hence augmenting the effect of their war-fighting capabilities through the effective use of information campaigns. Bowers notes that North Korea heavily relies on ‘deniability’ of its attacks, not only in cyber attacks but even in cases such as the landmine explosion in 2015 in DMZ that injured severely two South Korean soldiers. It is characteristic, also, for China to resort to repeated “sub-threshold” expansions in both China Seas, in order to create *fait accompli* without provoking strong military reactions (Takahashi in this volume.) Such sub-threshold actions are normally accompanied by Chinese use of various argumentations, or claims to certain rights, to

“explain” its action to external audiences by means of legal “cherry-pickings” (Patalano in this volume).

Such argumentations reflect the Chinese intentions to either downplay the asymmetry of Chinese capabilities, or to create an image where such Chinese actions are reaction to situations created by others, and not vice-versa. China’s strategic communication also covers Chinese domestic audiences to sell the bellicose image of the opponents as attempting to establish militaristic domination in the maritime domain that is within Chinese sovereignty. Such incidents cover the US presence in the South China Sea or with regard to the Japanese-administered islands of Senkaku (Diaoyu as the Chinese claim it) in the East China Sea. (Patalano in this volume).

What Implication so far? The regional hybrid action-reaction dynamics

Authors in this volume agree that hybrid warfare is not a “war-winning strategy”. It may even be counter-productive; hybrid warfare seems to be – in some cases such as North Korea – a counter-productive strategy as it is actually contributing to exacerbate the very effects it tries to offset. In other cases, it may also trigger escalation into high-end limited military confrontations, such as in the case of China’s maritime disputes in the China Seas. Stephen Biddle takes this consideration one step further, and asserts that, if given a choice, all actors, be they non-state or state actors, would prefer resorting to conventional war.

Despite such uncertainties, hybrid courses of action remain a preferred choice because of their short-term ability to confuse an adversary, inhibiting immediate reactions. Bowers’ article in this volume remind us that whilst conventional balance stands firmly in favor of deterrence, it is increasingly difficult to develop responses to the imaginative use of hybrid methods (in any combination) by North Korea. Ong’s article in this volume also stresses that for both state and non-state actors prominent in the region, it is not at all easy to prepare to deal with highly complex hybrid operations in order to avoid destabilization by hybrid attacks, particularly given the volatile mix of ethnicity and social factors in the region. On the other hand, hybrid strategies have been reinforcing perceptions that action is required to defuse their utility. The case of Japan is of particular interest in this regard. The Japanese government’s concern with hybridity (or “grey zone” events) predates Chinese military assertiveness in the China Seas. However, Takahashi argues that the main challenge now concerns the question of effective deterrence, namely, preventing revisionist actors from establishing *faits*

accomplis. He hence proposes existing deterrence theory to be revised to incorporate “grey-zone” contingencies.

Defining the key terms

Against this preliminary conceptual background, hybrid warfare is broadly conceived in this special issue as “the blending of conventional and non-conventional methods to achieve political-military objectives by both state and non-state actors; as such, it implies an ends-means link inherent in a strategy.” This conception is similar to the key NATO definition of hybrid warfare, which is constantly referred to in this volume: hybrid warfare involves hybrid threats, “those posed by adversaries with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives” (NATO, 2010).⁶ The special issue stresses the view that hybrid warfare is a means to an end, adopted for a political purpose, while retaining the relevance of modes of warfare in comprehending hybridity. The mode of warfare – i.e., the merging or simultaneous use of conventional and non-conventional methods – remains part of such conception, but it becomes an aspect that is *subordinated* to strategy, hence used flexibly by actors depending upon context.

This definition is not intended to constrain the contributors in this volume, who may find it necessary to challenge existing conceptual assumptions. It is intentionally broad and implies that both state and non-state actors could resort to such forms of warfare. In theory, the definition does neither preclude that various actors, state or non-state, may act in concert/in liaison with one another, nor rule out the broad range of methods used by hybrid state, non-state or combined actors, including criminal, cyber, or informational. (Bowers in this volume; Hoffman, 2010; Mansoor, 2012). The definition also has in mind the possibility that hybrid actors may choose targets to exploit various economic and social vulnerabilities of the opponent, hence indicating a broadening interface of warfare and the civilian world (Bowers in this volume; Liang and Xiangsui, 1999). As a starting point of analysis, the above shown definition of hybrid warfare is given, incorporating earlier observed dichotomies, from which various considerations and critiques may be advanced according to context.

⁶ A slightly expanded and more updated version of NATO definition is as follows: a broad, complex and adaptive and often *highly integrated combination of conventional and unconventional means, overt and covert activities*, by *military, paramilitary, irregular and civilian actors*, which are targeted to achieve (geo)political and strategic objectives .

War itself is conceived in this issue as Clausewitz defined, i.e. “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will”(Clausewitz, 2008), hence, involving physical violence. Most of all, war is subordinated to policy. This classic conceptualization does not, however, limit the agents of war to state actors (Clausewitz himself did not) or the nature of violence to conventional (again, Clausewitz himself did not). Some aspects of hybrid warfare may not involve direct use of violent means; rather they may involve the application and the use of (paramilitary or constabulary) force in a tailored fashion, by diverse actors, to control escalation and inhibit relevant military responses. To the extent that hybrid wars may involve attacks on social and economic activities in the broad sense in order to disrupt the war-executing capacities of the opponent, or attempts to change the parameters of conflicts, such actions may well amount to coercive acts intended to influence the opponent’s will, thus sharing the political dimension of warfare as traditionally defined.

The Issue Explained: The Content’s Structure

Stephen Biddle’s opening paper explores the determinants of non-state actor methods, thereby providing, for the purpose of this volume, an empirically-based template to consider how non-state actors (and nothing in the theory prevents us to consider by extension the state actors) choose fighting methods. As technology makes a conventional mode of fighting more achievable to a greater number of actors, conventional war-fighting has become a strategic option for non-state actors, who have been traditionally seen as to fight with irregular methods; this forms the basis of his assumption that all things being equal, all actors will prefer conventional war fighting as this is more effective. Providing empirical analysis on this global trend, the paper points out the importance of a systematic theory of non-state military behavior and choice to understand and anticipate how they fight and why.

The paper attempts to develop such a theory by focusing on internal politics of non-state actors, especially their institutional structure and war aim. They are important because implementing conventional military methods requires the complex cooperation among interdependent specialists. Thus, the paper illustrates, those actors with more institutionalized (rather than personalized) internal politics and existential conflicts (rather than limited-stake conflicts) with outsiders are more likely to choose conventional war-fighting methods. Such an observation poses a significant challenge to the traditional debate on “hybrid” warfare because it indicates any actor can choose

any method –regular, irregular or hybrid – of war fighting: ‘The net result is thus likely to be increased variance.’

The reminder of the special issue is devoted to specific policies of key state actors in the region. The first article provides an overview of the global hybridization of warfare manifested in the Asian region, identifying key clusters of hybridization focusing on China, North Korea and global jihadist networks, ISIS in particular. The paper written by Ong examines the fact that these actors constantly blur the boundaries of the war-conflict-peace spectrum to gain relative advantage. Here, the paper argues that a hybrid approach’s main feature is the attractiveness of the possibility to advance strategic objectives whilst keeping the risk of war low. With this understanding, the paper adopts the term ‘grey zone conflict’, which is about the blurring line between war and peace, and combines such understanding with his analysis of hybrid warfare.

Indeed, due to the military superiority of the US and its potential strategic interest in Asia, actors in the region, whilst willing to change a status quo or gain relative advantage, are not aiming to resort to high-end war. Because of a series of coercive actions ‘below the traditional thresholds of high-end war’ that actors in the regions resort to, their strategy is often described as ‘grey zone strategy’. Finally, this paper will address the impact of the constant pushing of boundaries in hybrid warfare, its unintended consequences and what states can do to counter hybrid threats.

Turning to the Korean peninsula, a long-term flash point in Asia, Bowers argues that hybrid warfare has been a long-standing element in the perennial conflict on the Korean peninsula. Since the end of the fighting in the Korean War, to gain strategic or political advantage in its ongoing conflict with South Korea, North Korea has consistently utilized hybrid warfare, resorting to a mixture of military techniques ranging from state-sponsored terrorism, to propaganda to cyber warfare. This hybrid approach has altered in-line with changes in North Korea’s economic capacity and technological capabilities. On examining the North Korean hybrid strategy, Bowers emphasizes the importance of the specific context, in which ‘DPRK is a relatively weak state actor opposed by a superior state actor in a strategic environment framed by a frozen war [or deterrent-stalemate]’. Under such a condition, the paper points out, its strategy is basically deterrence-based, aiming to weaken military countermeasures of South Korea and its alliance with the US. The attractiveness of the strategy is that it

‘allows Pyongyang to meet both policy and strategic goals without crossing a threshold which may result in threats to the regime’s survival.’

This resonates well with the initial consideration about escalation dominance and the contradictory method of irregular warfare aiming to limit the threshold of conflict. The paper indicates the fact that South Korea is one of the most experienced states to deal with the hybrid threats that characterise much of the today’s modern warfare. Furthermore, Seoul’s evolving strategic approach to North Korea betrays increasing hybrid elements. Being short of full-scale conventional conflict, the Korean peninsula will remain as a good test-case with which to examine the impact and effectiveness of hybrid warfare.

Sugio Takahashi subsequently explores the development of Japanese defence policy and strategy to respond to hybrid warfare. He argues that although many security challenges emerge today in the gray space between wartime and peacetime, traditional thinking on deterrence has instead focused on preventing war. Thus, gray-zone security challenges such as risks of fait accompli and probing have been recognized as challenges which are difficult to deter. Both in Asia and Europe, however, this kind of challenge is a serious and immediate concern, and appropriate concept building and policy response are required. In Japan, since late 2000s, gray-zone security challenges are treated as a priority issue and two strategy documents, the National Defense Program Guidelines in 2010 and 2013, reflect this perception. This article will tease out the characteristics of gray-zone security challenges and how Japan develops concept and policy responses to such challenges. Takahashi especially notes the importance of developing what he identifies as the principles of gray zone deterrence, which will hinge upon the government’s ability to combine denial and punishment to deter hybrid attacks, and the mobilization of all government assets.

The last paper argues that Chinese maritime coercion is best described as ‘hybrid strategy’ (NATO’s definition), not ‘grey zone’. Patalano argues that China’s constabulary coercive activities in the ESCS relate to ‘the legal objective of controlling parts of the sea’, aiming at ‘showing presence and control of uninhabited offshore island’ or ‘disputing other parties claims and control’. These activities, as well as Chinese maritime territorial claims, should be understood in the broader political and strategic goals to ‘project power within and beyond the ESCS’. It is here, the paper argues, ‘grey zone strategy’ cannot describe Chinese strategy well because it fails to

differentiate military and constabulary activities, and thus the layer of tactics and strategy. The paper points out that in Chinese maritime strategy constabulary coercions is functionally subordinated to military coercion. In that sense, the claim of 'grey zone strategy' also wrongly assumes the distinction between war and peace. The paper argues that in China's strategy "the deployment of capabilities and the use of force is tailored to the specific context and circumstances, not to an ambition to avoid armed clashes." By critically comparing the notion of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare through the Chinese maritime strategy, the paper highlights important utility of hybrid warfare as a concept and its specific relevance to the security environment in Asia.

(7,814 words)

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